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TAGS: [PREL](#) [KDEM](#) [OSCE](#) [RS](#)
SUBJECT: ODIHR BOYCOTT CONTINUES TO RESONATE

REF: MOSCOW 5433

Classified By: Ambassador William J. Burns. Reasons: 1.4 (b,d).

¶1. (SBU) Summary: ODIHR'S November 16 announcement that it would not send election monitors to Russia's December 2 parliamentary elections was the subject of incredulous GOR commentary over the weekend. The Central Election Commission (CEC) saw in the decision confirmation of the GOR's standing contention that ODIHR must be reformed. An MFA statement seconded the CEC, and placed the blame for cancellation on the "muddled" work of ODIHR. Kremlin-connected politicians like Duma International Affairs Commission Chairman Kosachev, echoed the MFA, while those in the opposition welcomed ODIHR's decision to stay home on election day. End summary.

¶2. (SBU) ODIHR's November 16 announcement that it would not send election observers to Russia's December 2 parliamentary elections, given the GOR's "unprecedented restrictions" seemed to shock GOR representatives, who reacted angrily to news of the election boycott. In addition to harsh statements from the Central Election Commission (CEC) and the MFA, CEC member Igor Borisov alleged that in canceling, "principles of political expediency" had trumped "international democratic standards." Borisov disputed the ODIHR contention that visa issuances had been delayed, and argued that the boycott would have no legal consequences for the integrity of the Duma elections. Duma International Affairs Chairman Konstantin Kosachev termed ODIHR's decision "politicized, opportunistic, and biased." CIS Inter-parliamentary Assembly General Secretary Mikhail Krotov alleged that the elections would be "normal" with or without ODIHR whose work, in any event, was inferior to that of PACE, which would be sending observers. Just Russia and Federation Council Chairman Sergey Mironov minimized ODIHR's decision, noting that "life would go on," even if they did not come.

¶3. (C) Members of the opposition disagreed. Union of Right Forces Chairman Nikita Belykh thought that GOR obstructionism was designed to compel ODIHR to pull its observers. Party confederate Boris Nemtsov saw in ODIHR's refusal evidence that Russia was "turning into Turkmenistan or Belarus." Mercator President Dmitriy Oreshkin, although his firm has a lucrative contract with the CEC, accused the Commission of being "a few months late" in inviting the observers. Ex-Prime Minister and likely presidential candidate Mikhail Kasyanov called ODIHR's decision "well founded." In an November 19 conversation, Center for Political Evaluation President Aleksandr Konovalov thought it was "better" if the observers did not come. Their presence, he thought, would provide a figleaf of legitimacy to an election whose result was a foregone conclusion.

¶4. (SBU) The November 17 - 18 RTR television news quoted Kosachev and noted that other international organizations, like the CIS Inter-Parliamentary Assembly, would be on hand to observe the elections. The more independent REN-TV did little more than chronicle the facts of the case. The

November 19 national daily Nezavisimaya Gazeta featured an editorial that called the GOR's unprecedented steps against ODIHR counterproductive.

Comment

15. (C) The reaction that followed ODIHR's surprise decision not to field observers for the Duma elections was along party lines. Those affiliated with the Kremlin's number one party, United Russia, were eager to blame ODIHR. Those in opposition were as anxious to finger the GOR.

16. (C) With ODIHR's boycott, efforts are reportedly being made to increase the size of the PACE mission, but it is likely that the final number of PACE delegates will be negligible and the elections in the end will be watched by a comparative handful of international monitors. At the polls as well, however, will be thousands of domestic political party representatives, journalists, and some NGOs that will have been taken under the wing of political parties or accredited as journalists. Their presence throughout the country will ensure that an imperfect spotlight will be turned on the process, at least on election day. Even without their contribution, the campaign abuses have received much media attention, and it is unlikely that any more or less impartial monitoring body will be able to label the Duma elections free and fair. It is all the more ironic, then, that the mandate for Putin all of that electoral manipulation has been designed to ensure would probably have emerged even if the election had come closer to meeting the OSCE's standards.

BURNS